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No. I.

LETTERS FROM COMMODORE ALEXANDER
GILLON IN 1778 and 1779.¹

[1]

Worthy Sir

As I am convinced no Gentⁿ. In America can better Judge of the propriety and practicability of the inclosed proposals than you can I feel happy in putting them under your protection to testify as you think will best answer ye purpose of supplying this Continent with ye Articles now so much wanted should my humble services be accepted of I am not without great hopes that by a proper explanation of ye Trade of this Country to my Countrymen in Holland I may induce them to become bold Adventurers this way in Trade & perhaps Negotiate a Loan that may prove convenient— Permit me to add that as I must give y usual comssons (which presume you will allow) in Europe for transacting y^e. business there I crave your opinion in y^e Adequate to y Expense & trouble I may be at in Europe in Superintending this Affair either as an Annual Stipend or a Comsson I am with much truth

Worthy Sir

Your most Obed^t Serv^t.

Alexander Gillon

To ye Honorable Henry Laurens Esq:

¹These letters are copies, and are to be found in one of Henry Laurens' Letter Books.

As my name has only appeared in these proposals, Objections may be made to leave so weighty a matter to One person in case of death therefore I mention ye parties intended to assist in it. M^r— is to reside in America to Act with Mess^{rs}. John S. Cripps and Mey in making ye remittances & delivering ye goods: I am with M^r house in France to dispose of ye remitt^s & make ye Purchases &c I am truly
Your obligd hble Serv^t.

A. G.

[2]

Sir

A few days ago I was favoured with a Letter from your Commercial Board acquainting me that y^e Honble Congress had pass'd an order for half ye Sum to be advanced me on my Contract but deferr'd Sending ye Money till it was known if I continued my engagement with them in consequence of an Appointment proposed for me during my absence by His Excellency y^e. President & the Honble y^e. Council of this State 25 days before my Contract with you as appears by his Excellency's Letter to me of y^e. 3^d. Nov^r. which I rec^d. on ye road ab^t. 300 Miles from York Town on my way here Permit me to observe to you my conduct thereon which I trust will be favorably thought of by Congress. On my arrival here I waited on his Excellency & thanked him for y^e. Honour intended me of appointing me to Command of y^e. Navy of this State but that I was not at my own disposal in consequence of my Contract with you that this was y^e. only reason why I did not accept of his friendly offer as I have held myself ready to act in that Line when called on so that I was not only bound by Gratitude but led by Inclination to give this State a preference of my very few Abilities if I had been disengaged in which his Excellency proposed writing you but y^e Letter from y^e. Commercial Board seems to imply a desire on your Part for me to prefer this Appointment to your Con-

tract wherefore I have taken ye liberty to accept of ye Command of y^e. Navy of this State provided you approve of it for which purpose I wish to set off for France y^e. 1st. May to procure y^e. 3 frigates (for here) where I must tarry some Months during which or any other time I shall be happy to execute any of your Commands but if you prefer my Complying with your Contract it will give me pleasure to Compleat it permit me therefore to request you will favor me with an early Answer ere I leave this that if necessary I may appoint Attornies here to ship y^e. Purchases I shall make & that on my arrival in Europe I may apply for & procure y^e. Credit wanted as I propos'd in case ye property from America shou'd be Captured or that I cannot effect ye Insurance on ye Exports & Imports. Shou'd you accede to my appointment here ye President concurs with me in Opinion that it will not interfere with my other business if I shou'd make your first Annual purchases as the Building and fitting out ye 3 Frigates will detain me 6 Months there & that I must go to Holland to adjust my old concerns there— I will only add that I very much Esteem ye continuance of your favourable Opinion condescend then to Grant it me & to beleve that no offer on Earth could have induc'd me to waver even A Iota from your Contract except the one of being call'd forth by the General Voice of the worthy People of this State be assur'd that neither Rank nor Interest had any Sway for if it cou'd your Contract by far exceeded any Income I could here tho they propose providing very bountifully for me & ye other Officers.

I am with all due Respect

Sir

You^r. most obed^t. & very hble Serv^t.

A. Gillon

To the Honble Henry Laurens Esq
President of the Honble the Continental Congress.

[Henry Laurens to A. Gillon.]

Charles Town 4th May 1778

Alexander Gillon

Sir

Your favor of the 4th. March reached me the original about the 14th. Copy on the 21st. April I should have hoped the Commercial Committee had long before that time given you their determination on the proposed Plan for importing goods—why the necessary measures had not been pursued on our part in due time I cannot tell—probably some delay was occasioned by the lowness of our Treasury there were calls from every Quarter for Money & every department had suffered exceedingly from want of Supplies in due time— but I remember to have heard a Gentleman say, who came to Town after you had left us that had he been present the bargain with you should not be concluded, his reason was, a failure on your in a former Contract when you promised to go to Europe in person & sent an Agent in your place & that the Accounts of that transaction remained unsettled.

This is all I know of the subject—I cannot doubt your having heard fully from the Committee, but my hands are so effectually or perhaps with more propriety actually employed in my own duty, that I have not time, nor would it be pleasing to those Gentlemen that I should further interfere than, to remind them now & then of the necessity for writing to you— I sincerely wish you Success in your Maritime engagement the Noble part which France has taken in our quarrel with Great Britain will smooth your road.

I have the honour to be &c
H. L.

[3.]

Charles Town So Carolina 25 June 78

Sir

I am much indebted to you for your very kind favour of ye 4th. past with it I rec^d a letter from ye Commercial

Committee inclosing a Resolve of Congress which assigns ye reasons why I was not to pursue my Contract with them all I wish'd for was to have it known & believ'd that I did not accept of my present Command but with this Proviso that Congress acquiesced in it in conseq^c. of my appⁿ. here being prior to my Contract with them as I allways held myself engaged to them & shou'd most certainly have exerted my utmost to've executed ye Contract had they not consented to ye App^t. here As to ye Gentleman who observ'd that had he been in Congress ye Bargain with me shou'd not have been concluded must have suppos'd himself to have had very much influence in Congress indeed I lament that those whom I think myself entitled to look up to as my friends did not Remark to that Gentlⁿ. the Reason why I was debarr'd of going to Europe to perform my other Contract, you know Sir that by ye fatigues of going from one end of ye State to ye other to procure Vessels Seamen &c caus'd a very alarming Attack of a Complaint that had reduced me much several times before & tho I had my baggage & every thing arrg'd so as to depart in 24 Hours it was pointed out to me as certain death to go to Sea, but to immedly set of for ye Northwd. at my leisure by Land Query then which was most for ye Interest of this Continent, my going to Sea to be thereby totally depriving Congress of getting what was so much wanted or else to send one of my Partners who was healthy and equal to ye business. Answer ye latter because he compleated what he went for & as ye Acctⁿ. not being settled that Gentlⁿ. will find very weighty reasons for, in my letter to ye Commercial Board inclosing them & as your hurry of Affairs may not admit your perusing of that letter * * (which I wished you received) I quote you the reasons I never rec^d. % Sales of one of ye Cargoes as it wou'd not sell in Cadiz (Say ye Indigo) but was Reship^d. & my partner rec^d. a Credit equal to what was suppos'd it wou'd nett, besides I knew ye ball^c. wou'd be trifling either way thus I wanted no after acc^t. & had I not been quitting ye Continent for a while I cou'd wish'd to've post-

pon'd sending any acct^d. till I had rec^d. ye above % but I have sent them now & I flatter myself on examining them it will appear that my contract has been ye best executed of any made of that kind & most sincerely do I wish that Gentleⁿ. as a Member of ye Community in General may find every Contract he Knows of or has ye adjusting of as faithfully compleated as mine thus instead of being reflected on I thought to have Rec^d. thanks for risking £45000 this being of my own property at a time so early that many had hardly determined what part to take in ye American Opposition, but Sir I did it with pleasure & at ye Repeated request of 6 Gentlemen of Congress I had ye pleasure of being acquainted with & I glory in saying ye Exports was made on ye best terms practicable from here they all got safe to Europe was sold at a profit of 36 pCt. or there abouts that one half of ye Nett proceeds was there laid out on acc^t. of ye Continent in Powder Arms &c on as good terms & as as good in quality as could be procured in France & deliv'd to them at first Cost, that about Lv^r. 4900 of my Moneys was laid out in same manner & deliv'd to their order at ye very Moderate Advance of 131 $\frac{1}{3}$ pCt. that ye remaining part of my funds in this Contract was expended to pay for Bills I had accepted to pay in Lisbon or Cadiz & some foreign debts that my partners saying that Americans cannot expect to pay our debts was of any force thus I was compelled to use a little of my own Moneys to my own disadvantage without injuring ye Continent & above all no part of these Adventures either going or coming was taken Pardon me for troubling you so much to explain this matter to you that you may be able to judge how far I merit applause or censure & to vindicate ye character of one who as a Citizen of ye State ye represent, takes ye liberty of saying he claims your protection ye small ball. due I requested them to order how it is to be paid. I expect to set off for Europe in 10 days to procure ye Frigates I'am to direct which I shall try to keep together to protect this Coast & Trade or or obey any other orders I may receive, if there is any

thing I can do in France that will give you pleasure permit me to receive your directions thereon under Cover to Mess^{rs}. H. L. Chaurand freres Merch^{ts} Nantes you will present. my best respects to your promising and worthy Son & believe me that I am happy in having ye honour to subscribe myself

Your Excellencys Most Ob^t. & most hble Serv^t.
A. Gillon

His Excellency
Henry Laurens Esq^r.—York Town.

(To be continued in the next number of this magazine.)